

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, February 29, 1892, with transcript

Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. L Steamship Fulda, Monday, Feb. 29th, 1892. Dear Mabel:

Time drifts away in a very lazy fashion on board ship — and it is Monday before I set pen again to my blessed Journal! Only hope you will read it my dear. Don't know that there is anything to write about — but will try and recall what I can. So here goes.

Let me see — where did I leave off — why at Gibraltar of course.

Revenons á nos montons.

Journal.

1892 Feb. 26th, Friday — at Gibraltar. Gibraltar seen through fog and mist and rain didn't seem the same beautiful object observed on the former trip. It looked every inch however — the ideal fortress — dark — gloomy — massive — running up into the clouds with such perpendicular lines as to suggest colossal and impossible height.

A solitary boatman dared the rain — in order to sell a few violets and oranges to the passengers. The poor drenched violets didn't take — but the tangerine oranges were bought up at once. Passengers from America are glad to purchase a few bright flowers — but those who have only just left Italy don't care much for the sodden bouquets offered here.

The Quarantine boat hailed us before we came to anchor and after a few formal inquiries the officer ordered the yellow flag to be lowered and then the oranges and violets came on board. "The Colonel" was much disappointed at the refusal of the Quarantine officer

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to take 2 him ashore and he could see no signs of a boat being sent from his man-of-war. (Quite a fleet of men-of-war lay under the guns of Gibraltar — “The Channel Fleet” I think I heard Colonel Schomberg remark). The Colonel had to be content with the company's tug which brought out the mail and a few passengers — also a nice telegram from “Med.” I rather think the oranges and violets must have come the same way for the water was too rough for any ordinary row-boat.

The Captain wisely decided to give us dinner while we lay at anchor as few on board could enjoy it outside.

After dinner up went the anchor and down went the passengers to their berths — all excepting a few who — like myself were able to stand a little tossing — with cigars in our mouths — and a good dinner in — in — in — retrospect!

Late at night I turned in — but not to sleep. Worse and worse grew the turmoil outside. Tangerine oranges were playing at ball on the floor of my stateroom. My valise which was in the upper berth — suddenly leaped across the stateroom — struck the edge of the sofa — and bounded to the floor — so much the worse for wear that I fear its future will be spent in the lumber-room or back-yard. Brushes and combs — books and clothing all formed a writhing mass on the floor. My berth was wide and I could not keep still until by a happy thought I wedged myself cross-wise in the berth.

This was all very well for a while — till the tooth-powder box came — smash — upon my head. After removing to the floor every 3 movable article that could by any possibility disturb my slumbers — I wedged myself in and resolutely closed my eyes. The motion of the ship was so great that I felt as though on a swing. A queer sinking sensation like that experienced on an elevator when it descends too quickly for comfort. I begin to think I must be a pretty good sailor for I did not feel a bit sick. Finally I did begin to feel a little sleepy and napped off by fits and starts. Then there came a crash that effectually stopped further efforts in this direction. A heavy sea struck the vessel so that it shivered from stem

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to stern. Tons of water fell upon the deck just over my head and then the vessel seemed to stop.

Feeling that something had gone wrong I sprang out of bed with beating heart and listened for what should come next. First came the avalanche of water pouring from the deck into the sea — then the tramp of hurrying feet upon the deck and a few hoarse commands in the German tongue — then an indescribable noise of pounding and chains — mingled with the howling of the wind and the surging of the sea.

After the first shock of alarm — I came to the conclusion that I could do no good on a sea-swept deck — and I took council of the little philosopher at home and felt that whatever was wrong couldn't be helped and that there was no use worrying over it. As you and Elsie and Daisy I know were safe on shore — I wedged myself into my berth once more and waited patiently for daylight to appear.

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1892, Feb. 27th, Saturday — on the stormy Atlantic. As soon as daylight appeared I dressed and went forth to investigate. The heavy sea that came aboard smashed in an iron door and nearly carried away one of our boats — besides doing other damage. They had to slow down almost to the stopping point in order to repair damages. At last they succeeded in hoisting up the injured boat which was hanging down, I understand, and banging against the side of the ship — and it is now lashed firmly to the deck. After that we crawled slowly along with no attempt at ordinary speed. At noon if I recollect correctly, our run was only 147 miles instead of 390 or 400 miles.

Although we went slowly — still seas occasionally came on board. Only 3 or 4 passengers at the table. I have the smoking-room all to myself — all the other habitués — hors de combat . Got my feet very wet on deck — neglected to change my socks as I had intended — result — woke up in middle of night with very sore throat.

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1892, Feb. 28th, Sunday — on the Atlantic.

Stormy — and still wet on deck. Throat very sore — unable to swallow without pain. Kept in my berth all day and nearly starved. Doctor gave me a chlorate of potash gargle. Much better at night — so that I was able to take some supper.

1892, Feb. 29th, Monday — on the Atlantic.

Throat all right this morning. Have put on warm woolen Beinn Bhreagh stockings and a pair of slippers. Fine day — sunny — but cool — decks dry — still a little rough but hardly enough to account for the emptiness of the table at lunch. Nearly every one sea-sick still. Don't understand it — for I have not felt the 5 slightest inclination in that direction — not even squeamish. One other passenger alone — has been free from mal de mer. Will now go up on deck for a walk if dry — and if not — for a solitary smoke in the empty smoking-room — whence all but I have fled.

Good-bye for the present.

Evening — 9 p. m. Have just come down from deck. Have spent all the time excepting meal-time on deck enjoying the fresh air. This afternoon watched the Italian steerage passengers playing a queer gambling game. So far as I understand matter — they have manual signs for numbers and two men play at a time. At a signal they both shout out a number and place a hand upon the table with the fingers properly displayed to show the number. If the figures don't tally there goes up a shout from the bystanders “No” or “Non” — and they try again. The repetitions are so rapid that they appear to beat time on the table to the ticking of a watch. The excited shouts of the combatants regularly and rhythmically uttered with the subdued “non's” (in between) of the crowd ending in a little while in the loud laughter accompanying success — sounded at a little distance like a song. I was attracted to the spot by the rhythmical shouts accompanied by the banging of the hands upon the table with the musical “non” of the crowd as a chorus and thought

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at first we had a sort of savage song — with a table for a tom-tom or drum. But soon I noticed the peculiar positions of the fingers — and recognized that the shouts were numbers called out rapidly by two performers — and I have given you above my idea of the performance.

6 1st performer 1 crowd 2 4 1 4 ha ha ha etc. non non non non 2nd performer 3 3 5 3 4

There were four men in all taking part in the performance — (excepting of course the crowd of on-lookers) — but only two played at a time. A fifth man stood by and kept a tally upon his fingers for the others. I presume there was some gambling about the matter — but I did not see any money change hands.

Only three ladies have appeared at the dinner table yet. One of these is a Miss Willeston? an actress and opera singer. Not particularly attractive though she has fine eyes. Not yet heard her sing.

I told you of the narrow escape of the tug-boat in Genoa from capsizing. Captain told us this evening that the rope had become entangled in the propeller of the Fulda. They backed to unwind it I suppose — or perhaps the rope was caught in the propeller when the vessel backed. A man — for 50 francs and a bottle of brandy! — dived under the propeller and cut the tangled rope free. He was quite exhausted when he came up and called for brandy. They handed him a quart bottle and told him to help himself which he proceeded to do — by emptying the whole bottle down his throat! The Captain says he expected the man to take only a moderate drink and return the bottle — and he hopes the man has not died in consequence of his rash act.

It is astonishing how much one can make out of nothing. When I started this note — or journal — I thought I had nothing to say and yet here I am at page 8. Only hope it is readable.

With much love to Elsie and Daisy.

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Your loving husband, Alec. Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell, %Maquay Hooker & Co.,  
Florence — Italy.